
**A Strategic Assessment of the Roles of Electoral Management Board (E.M.B) in Staff
Training and Development**

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ABSTRACT

Electoral reform is a broad term that covers, among other things, improving the responsiveness of electoral processes to public desires and expectations. However, not all electoral change can be considered electoral reform. Electoral change can only be referred to as reform if its primary goal is to improve electoral processes. It was observed in the study that the simultaneous implementation of major reforms in a range of different areas can place a great burden on an EMB, and will increase the risk of suboptimal implementation, especially when deadlines are tight. While sound implementation has the potential to meet intended targets, and hopefully to build confidence and trust in the effectiveness of elections and the EMB, failed implementation can have the opposite effect. This will be especially problematic if reforms are pursued without strong political support across the board; opponents of a particular initiative are likely to be looking for opportunities to characterize it as a failure, and to push for its abandonment. Conclusion was made in the study that electoral reforms are changes targeted at improving implementation of the guiding principles of electoral administration. Electoral reforms may be directed at the electoral legal framework— including the EMB—the administrative and technical processes of electoral management, or the political context for electoral activities. EMBs have vital roles as advocates of electoral reforms in general, as implementers of institutional reforms, and as initiators and implementers of administrative reforms, including technical reforms. It was recommended in the study that no aspect of electoral frameworks, systems, institutions, planning, management or operations is immune from reform or modernization. EMBs need to have a clear strategy for developing or responding to and implementing electoral reforms.

KEY WORDS: Electoral Management Board, Implementation, Electoral Reforms.

Introduction

It is quite obvious that an EMB's capacity to perform all of its electoral functions and responsibilities effectively depends very much on the capacities and performance of its secretariat staff. The capacities of both temporary and permanent secretariat staff can be enhanced by implementing appropriate recruitment strategies and vigorous training and development programmes. Most of the issues faced will be similar for all three models of electoral management, although they may manifest themselves in different ways. According to Alvarez, Lonna, & Thad (2012), public concerns about an EMB's professionalism can lead to calls for institutional reform (see the case studies on Mexico and Kenya). However, EMBs with a strong set of values can deliver elections whose results are accepted by stakeholders even though they are still in the process of developing professional staff (for example, in Bhutan). Each EMB needs to devise appropriate strategies to promote the effective use of

temporary staff. These strategies could include timely recruitment processes; measures to ensure the availability of experienced temporary staff for each electoral event, such as the payment of availability retainers; and measures to maintain contact with temporary staff between electoral events, such as databases of contact information, newsletters, reunion meetings or refresher courses. Such measures can be particularly appropriate for EMBs in countries without fixed intervals for elections.

Since EMBs must set an example of acting equitably, they need to implement recruitment and staffing policies that are conducive to gender balance in EMB staff and that promote the employment of women. Women and men need to be afforded equal opportunities for employment, training, promotion and benefits for all permanent and temporary EMB positions. This may require the EMB to introduce gender-sensitive employment practices and training. Enforceable requirements to appoint women to electoral management positions, from EMB membership through all levels of the organization to polling station staff, may assist in this regard.

Concept of Electoral Management

According to Norris, Frank, & Martinez, Coma, (2014), compliance with the legislative framework, including electoral regulations, procedures and manuals, is a prerequisite for the achievement of professionalism by an EMB. The term ‘professional electoral administrator’ demands a range of skills beyond those associated with technical or management qualifications in other specific fields. He or she also needs:

- An understanding of strategies for strengthening democratic development;
- A commitment to the fundamental principles of electoral good practice; and
- A strong commitment to high-quality electoral service to all stakeholders.

Specialist professional credentials and relevant management and technical experience help EMB members and staff become professional electoral administrators. They are also committed to the principles of electoral good practice, which include:

- *Integrity*: the ability to carry out duties in a non-partisan and independent manner by not acting to benefit political interests and/or corruptly, and by ensuring that the electoral law, rules and codes of conduct are followed;
- *Impartiality*: the ability to be fair and to afford stakeholders equitable and honest treatment on a level playing field, and to treat all stakeholders in an even-handed, non-partisan manner;
- *Independence*: the ability to work without influence from or being under the control of an external force, such as the government or the ruling party;
- *Transparency*: the ability of the EMB to be open and truthful, and to make timely information and access to EMB records available to stakeholders;
- *Efficiency*: the optimal use of all resources—electoral funds are used wisely, and activities are designed and conducted in a sustainable and cost-effective manner;
- *Service-Mindedness*: ensuring that all activity is aimed toward delivering high-quality services to all stakeholders, and in particular voters; and
- *Professionalism*: the meticulous and accurate implementation of electoral procedures, which is a key element of delivering credible elections. EMBs need to ensure that all election officials, whether core staff or temporary workers, are well trained and have the necessary skills to apply high professional standards. Professional training prompts public trust that the entire process is ‘in good hands’.

No matter how great their commitment to their work, the bulk of EMB members are not experienced in the full range of responsibilities associated with leading and managing electoral processes. Professional development for EMB members is as essential as the development of EMB secretariat staff for attaining and maintaining high-quality EMB performance.

Managing Electoral Change

According to UNDP (2005), electoral change management requirements will depend on the extent of the reform and the specific electoral processes involved. Changes to the model of the EMB—for example, from a Governmental to an Independent Model—require particularly careful planning to ensure a smooth transition and the retention of skills and institutional memory. It is crucial that changes to electoral structures and frameworks are agreed long enough before electoral events to allow for the preparation of new materials and the effective implementation of training.

Especially where the process of change applies to the nature or structure and staff of an EMB, it is essential to appoint a skilled manager and communicator to oversee and implement the changes. Changing organizational structures and individual roles within structures will inevitably create tension. Noted in Tokaji, (2009), transparency, honesty, serious consultation, communication and adequate forewarning are essential elements of managing personnel through electoral change. Timing is also critical. EMB staff have skills and knowledge that may be difficult to replace, especially close to an election date. Involving EMB members in change management demonstrates the EMB's commitment to reforms.

Reforming electoral technical processes may require the help of experts who specialize in particular technical areas. In implementing technical reforms, an EMB needs to ensure that the right procedural and system specifications have been chosen and correctly implemented. Thorough development review processes and pre-implementation testing are essential. The change management process also needs to include measurable indicators to evaluate the implementation of the electoral reforms, and clear responsibilities for reporting on indicators and improving performance if any indicator is not achieved.

EMBs plays a significant role in reform of electoral district boundary delimitation, for example as advocates of more transparent and equitable boundary delimitation processes; by providing expert opinions on boundary delimitation issues; and by ensuring that they exercise any responsibilities for boundary delimitation impartially, equitably and with integrity. Some electoral reforms have introduced multi-member districts, as this type of system, usually based on PR, can decrease the influence of electoral boundaries on election results (Norris, 2014). Other reforms have required boundary delimitations based on 'one person, one vote, and one value'. Some reforms attempt to make boundary delimitation processes more transparent and objective, for example by excluding the legislature from the delimitation process, placing an independent body in charge of delimitation, and requiring open hearings and independent review of proposed boundaries.

Many EMBs have implemented systems to improve the inclusiveness, fairness, accuracy and transparency of voter registration, for example, by providing for continuously updated voter registration, special registration provisions for transient voters, and safeguards against the wrongful rejection of a registration or removal from the electoral register. EMBs and other agencies responsible for maintaining data from which electoral registers are derived are improving the integrity of electoral registers by using better methods to check the identity of qualified persons and reducing data processing times, often using modern technological

solutions. EMBs need to ensure that technological solutions for voter registration enjoy citizens' trust and are sustainable, especially in emerging democracies where EMBs may have uncertain levels of future financial support (Rosas, 2010).

Staff Training and Development

One pillar of professionalism in electoral administration is the ongoing proper training and development of core permanent EMB staff (if any); temporary management staff appointed for specific electoral events; and the large numbers of field staff that may be temporarily employed for large-scale events such as elections, referendums or census-style voter registration. The principles of good electoral practice—such as impartiality, transparency, voting secrecy, equality of access, accountability and efficiency—form the basis of all EMB staff training. Staff training and development is a continuous activity. Changes in electoral procedures and technology, and the time that elapses between elections, mean that even the most experienced staff cannot rely entirely on their experience (Ernst & Ernst, (1979) cited in Van Aaken, (2005).

Because staff training and development is not immediately tangible, as ballot boxes or voter education and information materials are, there can be difficulties in persuading governments to approve sufficient funds for this task. Training and development also needs to be managed by a sufficiently senior individual to ensure that it is an organizational priority, including in the budget. “As the chief electoral officer of Canada has observed, voters expect the same high standard of service from every one of his 190,000 staff, whether they are long-term electoral professional employees or temporary staff who have only received two hours of training.”

EMB Organizational and Staff Development for Permanent Staff

Elklit, (2002) stated that Organizational and staff development (OSD) for EMBs addresses their long-term capacity-building and skills requirements, and takes into account staff career development. OSD aims to unify the EMB's strategic objectives and the skills required to attain them and its staff's career and personal development goals. An active OSD element will contribute to the EMB's sustainability.

It is important for an EMB to develop both short- and long-term strategies to address its OSD requirements. OSD requires a substantial, and preferably separate, dedicated budget, so the EMB will need to prioritize its training and development needs. For example, the Russian EMB has decided that training of core staff (rather than polling station staff) is its priority.

OSD is based on a needs assessment, which may be conducted in house or by outside contractors or management consultants. This needs assessment identifies all EMB tasks, compares the skill levels of staff with these tasks and identifies the gaps—from which specific organizational and individual staff training needs, and the appropriate training methodologies, can be determined. OSD programmes aim to train each EMB staff member to perform his or her tasks with maximum efficiency and professionalism.

According to Elklit, (2002), when assessing needs and developing OSD plans, EMBs may sense a need to choose between:

- (1) training staff to ensure they have the skills to do their current jobs and

- (2) Providing them with a broader set of skills, firmly based on the core principles of sound electoral administration, which they may not need immediately, but which will improve their ability to perform a range of different functions over time.

EMBs that ensure staff are diversely skilled may be better placed to cope with change in the long run and more able to respond with agility to evolving demands of the electoral environment than those that have focused predominantly on current needs.

Depending on the needs analysis, OSD can include general skills development, for example in: Written and verbal communication; Creativity, innovation and enterprise; Team building; Critical and strategic thinking and problem solving; Self-management; Dispute resolution skills; Project management; Using technology; Leadership, management, coaching and supervisory skills; and/or the development of technical skills relevant to the specific EMB division.

Staff development may take a number of basic forms, such as customized short-term informal training in the form of staff meetings and reviews, retreats and seminars; the formal or informal mentoring of staff by senior EMB or another organization's officials; and long-term formal training such as courses or academic development programmes. Continuous horizontal and vertical communication within the EMB not only contributes to development objectives but also greatly helps maintain organizational focus and improve staff performance. Open internal communication also reinforces the importance of transparency, and helps staff build knowledge of the organization and its activities on a continuous basis, outside the framework of formal training or mentoring (Voigt, Ebeling, & Blume, 2007).

Using International Experience

Through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, many EMBs have sent their staff to observe electoral management in other countries, or seconded them to other EMBs for training and exposure to different approaches to electoral organization. This is a quick and relatively inexpensive way of gaining new ideas and exposure to good practices in electoral administration. A number of large EMBs, like INE in Mexico and NEC in South Korea, organize international visitor programmes for their elections. Regional electoral associations can also facilitate the exchange of information and the secondment and training of electoral administrators.

International advisers and consultants have the potential to help EMBs solve difficult specific problems, to advise EMB members and staff on how to ensure that their operations meet international standards, and to enhance the EMB's internal problem-solving capacities.

When substantial teams of advisers are deployed to an EMB, it is particularly important to ensure that they avoid becoming a discrete clique within the organization, dealing with each other rather than with their counterparts.

Mentoring

Noted by Reynolds, (2001), the one-to-one mentoring approach to the professional development of selected permanent staff is not limited to projects with international consultants, but can be used to good effect internally by an EMB. Formal mentoring typically involves clearly establishing the conditions and goals of the mentoring programme at the outset. Informal mentoring, which ought to be part of any supervisor/subordinate relationship, can be less structured. Mentoring programmes can also help an EMB achieve some of its

equity goals for example, increasing the number of women or other targeted social or ethnic groups holding more senior management or technical positions. In addition to internal mentoring programmes, it may be possible to arrange short-term secondments of EMB staff to work with a mentor in another public sector agency or private sector organization.

Education and Development Courses for EMB Staff

There is a strong case for EMB staff gaining graduate or postgraduate qualifications in electoral management and governance to increase their actual and perceived professionalism. More institutions of higher learning are offering courses on aspects of governance and electoral administration, including American University (USA), Griffith University (Australia) and the University of Paris II (France). International IDEA developed a Model Curriculum for Master Programmes in Electoral Policy and Administration to encourage post-graduate professional education in electoral management.

According to Clark, (2014), the best-known professional development course available for electoral administrators is the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) course, which is supported by a partnership of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), International IDEA, IFES, UNDP and the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD). BRIDGE courses are presented by accredited BRIDGE facilitators, to whom the curriculum materials are made freely available as a global good. BRIDGE consists of 24 stand-alone modules in three main streams (Foundation Modules, Electoral Operations and Working with Electoral Stakeholders), so that any course can be tailored to an EMB's specific professional development needs. All BRIDGE modules are available in English. Some are also available in Arabic, Armenian, Dari and Pashto (Persian), French, Georgian, Indonesian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Tetum. As of July 2014, some 900 BRIDGE courses had been hosted in 93 countries, with the number being held increasing exponentially each year.

Operational Training

For an electoral event to proceed smoothly, it is essential that both permanent and temporary EMB staff receive appropriate operational training so that they fully understand the tasks required of them, especially when they are interacting with voters or other stakeholders, handling ballots or other accountable materials, or dealing with sensitive issues. At a minimum, such training needs to reinforce the importance of key requirements—such as respect for the law, neutrality and transparency—and to give participants a full understanding of the tasks they will be performing. For temporary staff, this will be the main emphasis, and manuals and checklists will be key tools. For permanent staff, training should also include an emphasis on the underlying systems and processes for which they will be responsible, with particular attention to contingency planning, backup mechanisms and problem solving.

Training Methods

Intensive training of temporary staff before every electoral event is a critical element of electoral service delivery and staff performance. The provision of a high-quality service, based on the principles of integrity and good electoral practice, is the underlying message of all temporary staff training. It is important for an EMB to develop a database of temporary staff who have been trained and worked satisfactorily during electoral events so they can be contacted to work in future electoral events.

Experience has shown that it is more effective to focus training for temporary staff on the specific operational elements of their responsibilities. Training in tasks such as voter registration, polling and counting is invariably more effective if supplemented with simulation exercises, such as role playing or mock exercises. Evaluation of each training session by the participants is essential for improved training performance.

Birch, S. (2011) opined that cascade training entails the training of a core group of trainers in both electoral technical matters and training techniques—the ‘training of trainers’ who in turn train others at a lower level. The second level trains the third level and so on, until all targeted staff are trained. Cascade training’s relative cost effectiveness and the ability to train large numbers of people in a short period of time mean that it is widely used in both new and established EMBs. It is especially useful for tasks undertaken by large numbers of staff, or where training has to be delivered simultaneously or almost simultaneously over large geographical areas.

Cascade training is effective if the training at different levels is sequenced within relatively short time periods, and if the training at the final level of the cascade (e.g. polling station staff) is conducted just a few days before the electoral event. This method requires that a large number of trainers fully understand the contents of the training sessions and the training methodology. Any failure or misunderstanding at the top of the chain will be passed on to the lower levels and may damage the whole exercise. Quality control measures—such as limiting the number of levels in the cascade and spot-check monitoring of training sessions—help to ensure that all training sessions are conducted accurately and consistently.

Training by Mobile Teams

A small number of mobile teams of trainers can conduct training for all election staff at all levels. This method has the advantage that the information is imparted accurately by competent teams of trainers. However, it requires more time, since a small number of teams are responsible for training all electoral staff across the country. While this may be an effective solution for electoral events held in very small geographical areas, it is not generally feasible elsewhere. If a large number of staff need to be trained and the mobile team starts training long before polling day, there is also a risk that the groups trained early will forget what they have learned.

Simultaneous Training

Voigt, & Salzberger, (2002), simultaneous training involves training all temporary staff on a single day or series of days. This approach could be used if there is very little time to prepare for an electoral event, or where a large-scale training event is useful to an EMB as an image-building exercise or to stimulate interest in or education about an electoral event, as in Cambodia in 1993. However, it requires a very large number of competent trainers who would generally need to be externally recruited and trained in the technical content. It is also costly and requires very intensive planning to implement. Using video technology to brief temporary staff with previous experience on the changes that have been made to procedures since their last election might be another way to carry out simultaneous training.

Training Materials

Instructions

Instructions in the form of easy-to-read sheets or checklists have long been used to complement cascade training of some tiers of electoral staff, for example polling station security officials, polling station staff and counting staff. An example of such a checklist was used in Tonga in 2010. Materials of this type can be made available in electronic format where such facilities exist.

Training Manuals

Most EMBs rely on training manuals to impart skills to election officials. Manuals that are accurate, user friendly, well written, and easy to interpret and apply are an indispensable training aid. It is effective to develop separate components of a manual to cover categories of staff with different duties, and to include simple checklists of their essential tasks and a set of questions to verify their knowledge. Hard copy manuals can be supplemented by soft copies from which additional materials can be printed. Sufficient copies of manuals can be printed to allow election officials to take them home after training, either for further reading or for reference while they are working. In Hungary, electronic training facilities are used, including an electronic manual and a test on its contents (Catt, Andrew, Michael, Alan, & Peter 2014).

EMB's can also consider producing manuals on electoral processes for their various stakeholders, such as political parties and candidates, party agents, the media and election observers. The better the stakeholders' understanding of the electoral processes, the easier a competent EMB's work is likely to be.

Simulations and Videos

Simulating electoral processes, such as voter registration, polling and counting processes, is a popular training method. Simulations and similar hands-on and interactive training experiences are generally regarded as the most effective method of training temporary EMB staff, and are worthy of being included in every training session.

The use of videos and graphics to illustrate and reinforce training texts and messages, and make presentations to smaller groups, is growing in popularity with trainers. These materials are useful to support, rather than serve as the basis of, electoral training. Video materials can be most effective when developed as short, focused segments that can be used to illustrate specific work activities and guide simulations. Before developing training sessions that rely on video content, an EMB needs to be sure that appropriate video facilities are available and affordable at all training locations.

Conclusion

Electoral reforms are changes targeted at improving implementation of the guiding principles of electoral administration. Electoral reforms may be directed at the electoral legal framework—including the EMB—the administrative and technical processes of electoral management, or the political context for electoral activities. EMBs have vital roles as advocates of electoral reforms in general, as implementers of institutional reforms, and as initiators and implementers of administrative reforms, including technical reforms.

Recommendations

1. No aspect of electoral frameworks, systems, institutions, planning, management or operations is immune from reform or modernization. EMBs need to have a clear strategy for developing or responding to and implementing electoral reforms.
2. Electoral reform needs to be carefully managed to ensure that it fulfils its purpose without confusing electors and with minimal disruption to electoral administration.

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